

The University of Chicago

AN ANALYSIS OF MESCALERO
AND CHIRICAHUA APACHE SOCIAL ORGAN-
IZATION IN THE LIGHT OF THEIR
SYSTEMS OF RELATIONSHIP

A PART OF A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO
THE FACULTY OF THE DIVISION OF THE
SOCIAL SCIENCES IN CANDIDACY FOR
THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY

1933

By

MORRIS EDWARD OPLER

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I. Preliminary Survey

A. Method

This paper is an analysis and interpretation of the social structure of two preliterate groups, undertaken mainly in the light of their systems of reckoning consanguinity and affinity.

The terms by means of which these relationships are expressed have proved to be verbal symbols of definite attitudes and rights. The sum of the relationships so expressed has pointed to the most significant contours of the social structure. Unless my experience is unique, one of the important tasks for students of social organization is, therefore, to seek out the full range and implications of the meanings, privileges, and obligations attached to these kinship terms.

The terms as such are not important. The largest collection of kinship terms or even of genealogies is of no consequence in itself. But such terms may be put to work. They may be used as a common language intelligible to both native and ethnologist. That a native acts in a certain way to one man and in a contrary manner to another may be puzzling until an analysis of terminology furnishes the key and transforms a hodgepodge of seemingly formless and irreconcilable attitudes and actions into unified and consonant activity.

One can think of such terms as points of concentration of socially conditioned behavior. Consequently, the intelligent thing to do, if the analyzation of behavior is our task, is to go to these verbal points of crystalization and concentration of social behavior and test their significance through genealogy,

observation, and informant under every possible condition; in short, to use them to the fullest measure as media through which the native conceptions and social groupings may be revealed. Throughout this paper, then, kinship terminology will be regarded as a means and a technique with which to investigate the facts of social integration which lie behind the terms themselves.

I do not mean to hold up the approach pursued here as a standard of methodology for the study of social organization everywhere. Naturally an analysis of kinship terminology will be most illuminating when utilized in respect to a people whose basic social unit is organized on the principle of kinship. Undoubtedly the approach is so well suited to the groups under discussion because their fundamental social and economic unit is the domestic family. Where the kinship principle is less paramount, where location, vocation, or status exercise more control over social grouping, where a centralized government is invested with many of the functions performed by the family among the Apaches, even a complete understanding of the system of relationship may fail to give a satisfactory picture of the total social structure. Useful as considerations of kinship bonds have been in explaining Apache social organization, it will appear from the following pages that much in Apache social life has to be accounted for by recourse to other grounds.

Nevertheless, I believe that a complete analysis of relationships controlled by kinship is necessary to a clear understanding of a social order, even though these relationships may not nearly encompass the entire social structure. To know how functionally important the kinship group is not, is a first step in learning how functionally important some other unit must be. To know how much or how little of the social life the kinship

bonds regulate is to gain some perspective on the relative importance of other controlling principles.

It has already been stated that the social organization of two preliterate groups is to be examined. They are two Apache tribes, one the Mescalero, the other the Chiricahua. It must not be supposed that the study is therefore a comparative one. When the field work which has yielded the data for this paper was undertaken, it was expected that the results would dictate a comparative treatment. Consequently material obtained from Chiricahua informants was kept carefully separated from Mescalero data. Again, when the material was being typewritten, two folders were made for every heading, one for Chiricahua data pertaining to the point and one for the Mescalero version. A later examination and comparison of the contents of these folders has shown few important differences in social organization. Instead there is such a unity of pattern and terminology that a comparative treatment would be too meager in content to be of any use, and a separate treatment would be superfluous. It has been thought best to deal with both tribes here, calling attention from time to time to the differences that do obtain.

B. The tribe

It may be thought that an admission of such great unity between two groups whose territories were adjacent and who both speak dialects of the Athabaskan language stock, raises some doubt as to whether they deserve to be called separate tribes at all.

The justification for calling the Mescaleros and Chiricahuas separate tribes rests on territorial, linguistic, and cultural grounds.

Each had definite and exclusive territory. I am able to give the tribal boundaries only very generally at present, although they have been described to me in great detail by the old Apache men. Unfortunately the informants have given me the landmarks in the native tongue and do not know the English equivalents for the mountains and dividing lines they describe. The most expeditious way to settle the matter will be to travel with an old informant to some of these landmarks, and this will be done as soon as time permits. But so long as there are only likely guesses concerning the English names for the many Apache landmarks, the very general boundaries, of which we are sure, will serve the present purpose and eliminate the danger of error.

Formerly the Mescaieros ranged principally in New Mexico. Their eastern limit was the flats around Hondo. Occasionally they reached as far north as Santa Fe. On the south they extended into northwestern Texas and into Old Mexico. The Rio Grande was the western boundary.

The Chiricahuas ranged in western New Mexico, in southeastern Arizona, and to the south in Old Mexico. Their eastern boundary began at the Rio Grande. They ranged westward approximately to the eastern boundaries of the present White Mountain and San Carlos Indian reservations. The territory they claimed reached the Pueblo district of Laguna and Acoma to the north, and on the south they extended into Chihuahua and Sonora, Old Mexico.

These boundaries were known to all and were jealously guarded. The view is that each tribe was given its territory in the beginning and was expected to keep within it under penalty of hostilities.

The second factor which designates these groups as tribes is the sharp cleavage in language. Although each speaks a dia-

lect of the southern division of the Athabaskan stock, and although the two dialects are close indeed from a morphological view, there is a marked difference in vocabulary and enough difference in the phonetics to cause the matter to assume decided importance in the eyes of the natives. Even now, though the two groups have been on the same reservation for many years and not a few of the variations, especially in vocabulary, have been erased, the difference in speech often provokes ridicule and derision.

It may seem paradoxical to treat of the two groups together in this paper because of the pronounced similarity in their respective social organizations, and then to argue that they be recognized as separate tribes on the grounds of cultural dissimilarities. The matter becomes more understandable when we add that these differences are primarily on the side of material culture. Due largely to geographic position and hence to varying contacts, the dress, hair dress, mode of decoration, and dwellings of the Chiricahuas and Mescaleros differ considerably.

Quite as important as any of the easily discernable differences mentioned above, and no doubt accountable in terms of their aggregate, is the feeling of the Apache himself toward the tribal grouping. Within the tribe as it has been described here, there is a very real unity. The Chiricahuas, though they are divided into three well defined bands, consider themselves as one people. Hostilities between two of these bands is unthinkable. And along with this inner unity goes the practice of opposing one's own tribe to all others. Warfare between members of one tribe and members of the other could and did take place. It was not a conflict of tribe against tribe, for, as will be pointed out below, the tribe was never the war-making unit. The fact is,

however, that when warfare among the Apaches did break out, the opponents were of different tribes.

The United States Government had occasion to learn this fact at the cost of much expense and disturbance. It once tried to station the Chiricahuas on the San Carlos Apache Reservation. Bloodshed and disorder resulted. An attempt to permanently place the Jicarilla Apaches on the Mescalero Reservation failed dismally some years ago. The Chiricahuas now share the Mescalero Reservation, it is true. But before coming to Mescalero they had been retained separately at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for many years, and there many of the old incorrigibles died, and all of the young people were trained and educated by white missionaries.

Yet even now the relations of the two tribes are none too friendly. One side regards the other with dislike and suspicion. The Chiricahuas speak feelingly of their better condition in Oklahoma. The Mescaleros are sure that sad days have fallen upon the reservation and that all morality and restraint are disappearing from among the young people. They can date the decline from the very hour the Chiricahuas arrived.

The bitterness emerges many times in work with informants. A favorite charge is that of witchcraft. One old Chiricahua man paused in a discussion of witchcraft to announce that all Mescaleros are witches. My interpreter at the time was a Chiricahua also, but he was married to a Mescalero woman. He tried valiantly to force the old man to admit that not all of the Mescaleros were witches. But the old man was adamant. He offered instead to relate how his entire family had been destroyed by Mescalero witchcraft.

Often, too, when discussing some social custom, an informant will volunteer the information that the members of the

other tribe are decidedly lax about its observance. Investigation invariably shows quite as faithful an observance on one side as on the other.

Of the further characteristics and functions of the tribe more will be said later. The intention at this point is only to summarize very briefly the salient attributes of the social units, so that some broad and generalized picture of the social whole may be envisaged before analyzing its component parts.

C. The band

The complete dependence of these Apaches on wild plant and animal life made it impossible for all members of a tribe to live together. The precarious food supply would soon have been depleted in any restricted area under such conditions. Instead we note a tendency for a tribe to spread out over a large area and to be segmented into social units of graded sizes, all held together by loose bonds, and merging, one into the other, until the tribe is reached.

The unit next in size to the tribe is the band. The band may be thought of as a division of the tribe based on location. Its scattered condition and the vast extent of land it covered, left the tribe a particularly useless unit for emergency action. It was the office of the band to step into the breach at such a time. The Apache band really consists of the members of the tribe who live in an area circumscribed enough to permit unity of action at critical moments for defense or offense. The band is, therefore, the largest unit of warfare, though we shall see that a still smaller unit normally acts in matters of raid and aggression. As we would expect in view of its primary function, the band has recognized leaders. These are the most capable and distinguished

leaders of smaller units, which, in turn, compose the band.

The boundaries of band territory are not so definite as are the tribal limits nor are they inviolate. Members of one band visit freely within the range of another without causing dissension.

At times of elaborate feasts or important ceremonies the close nexus between band and tribe is plainly revealed. At such times the strict boundaries of the band dissolve. Such an occasion would be a Girl's Adolescent Rite and the feast which follows. If a very wealthy man, whose daughter has come of age, is expected to spend much property in celebration of the event, the news travels beyond the band, and people from other bands, if they feel that the occasion warrants the trouble, will attend and be welcomed and entertained.

The ability of the bands to live together in peace is another indication that the band is nothing more than an expedient territorial partition of the tribe. The difficulties encountered when different tribes were placed on one reservation were never felt when bands of one tribe were brought together.

After the Indian Wars of 1885-86 the bands of Chiricahuas were combined as prisoners of war, first in Florida, then in Alabama, later in Oklahoma, and now they reside side by side at Mescalero. Nowhere was there any disagreement.

But though the band is based almost entirely on location within tribal territory, it must not be thought that its bonds are too weak to justify calling it a distinct social unit. On the contrary the concept of the band is a fundamental one in Apache ideology.

When the Chiricahuas were located at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, they were allowed to choose their own house-sites. With the aid

of a Chiricahua Apache, I have drawn a rough map of the Fort Sill Reservation, showing the location of all houses, and enumerating the names and band affiliations of all occupants. It is interesting to note that the grouping of the houses closely follows the lines of band affiliation.

Before Captain John J. Bourke led his forces against the Chiricahua Apaches, he had had contact with the Apaches generically known as the San Carlos, and had obtained a list of clan names from them. Without inquiring into the true state of affairs, he erroneously took it for granted that the Chiricahuas were also divided into clans. When he captured prisoners he demanded to know their clan affiliation. What he obtained, for the most part, was the band name, and he triumphantly and quite wrongly published these names as evidence of clans among the Chiricahua.¹ An Apache speaks of members of his tribe as ine, "the men," "the people," but if you ask him what he is, he answers with his band name, just as the prisoners responded to Bourke.

This territorial unit is of utmost practical importance to the Apache. It governs most of his immediate contacts. If, when I was attempting to secure the band affiliations of a number of people, the allocation of one were in doubt, the informant would think for a while and then say with conviction, "He must be a tcihende (a band name). I always see him with the tcihende."

The Chiricahua bands are three in number. The most northern of the three was the tcihene, "red paint people." In historic times this band was led by the well-known Victorio. The

¹ "Notes upon the Gentile Organization of the Apaches of Arizona," the Journal of American Folk Lore, III, (1890), 115.

band has been given a variety of names throughout the literature. Those occurring most frequently are Warm Springs Apache or Ojo Caliente Apache, Coppermine Apache, and Mimbrenos Apache.

To the south of the tcihene and ranging through southeastern Arizona and southwestern New Mexico, a second band, the tcokanen is found. The etymology of this name is in doubt, though there is some evidence that the word means "tall men." It was this band, often called in literature "Cochise's Apaches" after their leader, tcic, "Cochise," which controlled Apache Pass and with which the government had much trouble during the Indian wars. It was this band, too, which gave the name Chiricahua to the whole tribe. One local division of this band had as its main refuge the rocky indentations along a mountain range called tseghata. They were therefore called tseghatahende, "rock pocket people." The Spanish name for this mountain range is the Chiricahua Mountains. At first the name Chiricahua was applied only to the Indians ranging in the vicinity of these mountains. When hostilities began, however, and all the bands were considered a common enemy, the name was used indiscriminately of all the hostiles. The name is now so well known and established that it has been thought best to retain it here.

The third and southernmost band of the Chiricahuas is the ndendai, "enemy people." They stayed almost entirely in what is now Old Mexico, their territory embracing parts of both Sonora and Chihuahua.

The Mescaleros were divided into two bands. One was called nitahende, "people close to the edge of the mountains." The favorite haunts of this group were in the vicinity of the Sacramento and Sierra Blanca mountain ranges.

The second band stayed on the flats farther to the east

in times of peace and called themselves gulgahende, "people of the plains."

These two Mescalero bands were, like the Chiricahua bands, one in language and customs, and recognized themselves as one people. Like the Chiricahua bands, each had its separate leaders.

D. Local division of band

The band has been defined as a social segment the boundaries of which are roughly determined by the possibility of uniting the people within them for emergency action. This definition suggests that the band is by no means the ultimate division of the tribe. In a semi-arid country it is not surprising to find that a population dependent on wild plant and animal life is spread thinly over a considerable area by means of graduated social segments.

Within the territory recognized by a band as its own there were favorite places, places easy to defend and difficult to storm, spots where the winter's food supply could be safely cached, comfortable and secluded refuges, often surrounded by mountains and inaccessible country to which retreat was always possible in time of trouble. The Apache had a complete knowledge of all these sheltered and favorably located fastnesses in his territory. And though the life was nomadic in character, though the men entered upon hunts and raids which took them away for days, and the women traveled long distances to gather and prepare the seeds and plants needed for the household use, the Apache did require a base.

And so we find that the band is subdivided into groups, each consisting of a number of families. Each group uses a favorably situated spot, such as has been described above, as a

convenient base. From this place parties are constantly setting out to foray for food. A whole family often departs on an economic errand. A body of men may set out from here on a raid for booty or on the war-path mission of revenge. But as long as their families are associated with this group, they are powerfully linked to it and will all drift back.

This subdivision of the band is what I have chosen to call the Apache "local group." It is the Apache unit, above all others, which depends on a definite locality. Moreover the group takes its name from that of the locality. For instance, the members of a subdivision of the tcokanen band of the Chiricahua tribe, who, when not engaged in other activities, camped around a certain low-peaked mountain, are called dzilnokanende - which means literally "people of the low-peaked mountain." The members of the local division which had its camps about a mountain in Old Mexico called Mount Moro are known as the dzilmorende which can be translated "people who live around the mountain Moro." I know of no case where the local group does not take its name from some geographical feature of its chosen site. There is no precise Apache term for "local group." The nearest equivalent would be gota. The word gota is used in two different senses. The first usage is a rather vague and loose one. Any group of camps, any settlement of considerable size, is termed gota. The word is now used to designate the cities and towns of the white man. In this sense an Apache might even speak of the totality of Indian encampments on the Mescalero Reservation as gota. It is in this rather general sense that an Apache would refer to the local group as gota.

The same term, gota, is also used with a different and more exact meaning to connote the "extended domestic family,"

soon to be discussed. Then it is always accompanied by the name of the leader of that social unit.

The functions and properties of the local division of the band will be treated in some detail in another place, but it may be useful to sketch its most outstanding characteristics now.

The local group is composed of families whose members are related by affinity, or who, though not related, have elected to live together because of the chance to make a powerful economic alliance. We have, then, a group of people united by the inter-marriage of members or by community of interest. Most of the time they camp within easy reach of the same natural landmark. They quickly learn of all ceremonial or social events which occur within the group. Their residence in one general locality makes co-operation for raid or war-path possible.

As might be supposed, therefore, the local division of the band is normally the body present at ceremonies or invited to the social dances. At much advertised and costly events of this nature, individuals from the band or tribe may be present also, but the only group ordinarily represented in force is the local division.

The members of this group, who live together, dance together, and feast together, also co-operate in battle and raid. No one family possesses sufficient fighting men to carry on warfare and raid alone. But one can always recruit from nearby camps enough volunteers whose family larders are also low. Consequently the local division is found to be the normal raiding and fighting unit. We shall see that, in keeping with this aspect of its services, the local division has charge of the training of the young man for the war-path. The warlike functions of the local division suggest the necessity for leadership. The

local division does have its nanta or leader, whose powers and influence will be dealt with presently. It has already been mentioned that the most wealthy and powerful nanta of the local groups leads the entire band should occasion for concerted action arise.

The band is a stable unit. Its territory is extensive enough so that a man, even though he changes residence several times within his lifetime, will still remain within its boundaries.

The local group does not share this stability. The local group, as we have seen, depends upon residence in a given place. The members of some of its constituent families are united by marriage, it is true, but this is hardly a serious bond, for there is no social or practical necessity for these families to camp together, and, while the tendency is present, the practice is not always followed.

The families that constitute the local group are there, then, because they consider the particular spot a favorable one for defense or from which to reach a food supply. Or they may wish to associate themselves with the leader of this group, who has been extremely successful in raiding, in the hopes that they may share in the good fortune. A family is under no obligations to remain with a local group if it cares to go elsewhere. The leader of the local group has no control over the families beyond his personal influence and prestige.

Under these conditions there is a continual redistribution of family groups within local groups and local groups within a band. For some reason the food supply of the neighborhood may diminish, and the local group melts away. Or an epidemic of deaths may convince a good number of families that they would be

better off elsewhere. Likewise the death of a leader may bring changes in the group membership. Several instances have been recorded where factional disputes have resulted in the withdrawal of the aggrieved parties to other sections.

The amorphous character of the local group was a source of much confusion in the early stages of the fieldwork. It was disconcerting to have an informant associate himself with one local group on one day and choose another as his local group on the second. The first suspicion was that the informants were exaggerating. But when the true nature of the local group was understood and the matter was handled chronologically, the native was always able to demonstrate that he had belonged to these several local groups, each at a different period of his life.

E. The family

The relation of the individual Apache to the social units thus far treated has been markedly casual. He recognizes his tribesman as one of "the people," as one who speaks, dresses, and thinks much as he does. If a tribesman traveling through his territory needs assistance or shelter, these are freely granted. There is nothing more compelling in one's relation to a member of the same tribe.

The Apache thinks of the member of the same band as a tribesman whose fortunes are a little nearer his own. If the local group of a member of the same band is not too far distant, he may know of him and his family, he may have seen this man or the leader of his band at a social dance. If a common enemy invades the district, both he and the other man may share the duty of repulsing the foe.

one with more safeguards for its solidarity.

It is not difficult to see why a unit with the general features of the domestic family should be the sine qua non of Apache society. It was the task of the Apache to wrest a meager subsistence from a semi-arid country. He depended upon game and wild plants. A very large-sized group would constitute a severe drain on the natural resources of a locality. A large group, moreover, would militate against easy mobility when a failing food supply necessitated a movement to a more desirable locality. But, on the other hand, the members of the economic unit must not be too few in number. Many of the foods are seasonal. The wild seeds and mescal must be gathered, prepared, and stored when they ripen, and the co-operation of a number of men and women is needed at such times. To keep abreast of the level of subsistence, affairs within the group must go smoothly, there may be little internal friction. Group loyalty must be an active reality. Under such conditions, moreover, the loss of a member is a blow at the safety and unity of the group. The group will feel bound to protect its members, therefore; to plead for them when they stand accused; to avenge them when they are slain.

The extended domestic family is admirably suited to these requirements. Its members numbered in average from twenty to thirty. It possessed mobility and yet could also command enough willing hands for the necessary tasks. To its inner strength and unity the following pages will attest.

The activities, functions, and services which the family govern are expressed in the relationship of its members to one another. These inter-relationships, as we have noted before, are expressed as a whole in a kinship system and between individuals by means of kinship terms.

It is possible, then, by analyzing the system of relationship, by noting such features as it presents when viewed as an entity, and by investigating each term in the light of its usage and social implications, to gain a comprehensive and intimate knowledge of every aspect of the domestic family. This is the method which will be followed here.

The relationship terms fall into two general categories, those which imply consanguinity and those which are based on affinity. For the sake of simplicity those which refer to consanguinity will be discussed separately.

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